

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Tennessee Hospital Emergency Room Drug Study represents landmark research conducted on a statewide probability sample of emergency room (ER) patients, 18 years and older. This unique population-based study was designed to generate estimates of the prevalence of alcohol and/or other drug (AOD) use, dependence and need for treatment among this high-risk group. By utilizing scientifically valid sampling and weighting techniques, the investigators generated data that provided maximum comparability to the Tennessee population at large. Moreover, they combined self-reported AOD use and dependence data (also using DSM-IV clinical criteria) with results of saliva testing and urinalysis to confirm current AOD use.

Studying AOD use, dependence, and treatment need presents a variety of methodological problems. The most serious of these is the likelihood that prevalence estimates will be conservative. Given the tendency among persons to deny AOD problems, self-reported use and dependence may be grossly underestimated. This made it imperative to conduct AOD screening through bioanalysis of patients' saliva and urine.

Eighty percent of eligible ER patients approached to participate in the study agreed to do so. They numbered approximately 1,600. Once they had given informed consent, they were asked a series of questions to ascertain sociodemographic factors and AOD use. At the conclusion of the interview, participants were requested to provide saliva and urine specimens. Nine percent refused to provide saliva; 20% refused to provide urine; and 7% declined to provide either specimen.

Disaggregated by sex, the study sample closely resembled the adult Tennessee population. Males comprised 43% of the ER sample compared with 47% of the State population. Disaggregation by age, however, revealed that the ER sample over represented the young. Forty-five percent of the ER patients in the study sample were aged 18-34 years compared with 33% of Tennesseans. Not only did females constitute a majority of the ER patients, but those aged 25-34 were strongly over represented. They comprised 16% of ER patients compared with 10% of the Tennessee population. Females aged 18-24 were also somewhat over represented among the ER patients; that is, 10% of ER patients versus 7% of the Tennessee population. Their male counterparts comprised 9% of the ER sample and 7% of the Tennessee population.

When the ER sample and the Tennessee population were analyzed by race, age and sex, young whites and blacks both emerged as being over represented in the ER sample. Most predominant among the ER patients were white males, aged 18-24 years; white females, aged 25-34; black males, aged 25-44 and 55-64; and black females, aged 18-44. Overall, blacks were over represented and whites were under-represented among the ER patients. Although only comprising 14% of Tennesseans aged 18 years and older, blacks constituted almost one-quarter of the ER sample.